

## Citizens United at 13

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MADISON - Saturday marks the thirteenth anniversary of the notorious [Citizens United](#) decision, which opened the floodgates to big and dark money in our politics.

That decision by the U.S. Supreme Court allows corporations, other groups, and super-rich individuals to spend unlimited amounts to tell you who to vote for or not for, so long as they don't coordinate with the candidates.

*Citizens United* was the obstetrician that delivered us SuperPACs, but they're not babies anymore. They're monsters.

And along with a few other Supreme Court decisions, especially the [McCutcheon](#) decision of 2014, which said the government could put no aggregate limit on the amount that rich folks could spend in our elections,

*Citizens United* has turned our politics into a playground for billionaires.

Just look at the recent midterms.

According to a [report by Americans for Tax Fairness](#), billionaires had already “pumped an unprecedented \$881 million into the federal midterm elections [five weeks before the election], distorting our democracy by drowning out the voices of regular Americans. That’s already much more money than billionaires contributed during the entire length of the 2018 midterm election cycle, the previous record.”

The report noted that Republican billionaires are outspending Democratic ones: “GOP forces are enjoying a 3-2 advantage in billionaire donations.”

Even if they weren’t, that’s not the point.

The point is this: Our politics shouldn’t be a tug of war between billionaires on the right and billionaires on the left. In a real democracy, we’d all have an equal tug on that rope.

But we don’t because of the gross maldistribution of wealth in this country.

And we don’t because of *Citizens United* and a raft of other bad decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court dating back to the nineteenth century on [corporate personhood](#).

Here in Wisconsin, we can see the nasty consequences of *Citizens United*.

In 2010, outside spending in our fall elections for governor and the legislature and other non-federal races came to just under \$20 million. Last year, it soared to over [\\$90 million](#), with a lot of this money coming from out of state.

This outside spending, blessed by *Citizens United*, makes a mockery of the ideal that we all have an equal voice in our democracy. And the money that comes from out of state undercuts the ideal of local self-governance.

The problem of big and dark money in our politics in Wisconsin got worse in 2015 when the Republican-dominated state legislature (thanks, largely, to [gerrymandering](#)) rewrote our campaign finance law. The new law, signed by Scott Walker, tore down the de facto \$10,000 limit on how much individuals could give to those political parties. So now billionaires from across the country are writing enormous checks to the Democratic and Republican parties here.

We do not have self-rule when the super-rich can spend unlimited amounts of money in our political arena.

We must overturn *Citizens United* and all its ugly relatives.

And the best way to do that is to amend the U.S. Constitution and proclaim, finally, that corporations aren't persons and money isn't speech.

Here in Wisconsin, the grassroots group [Wisconsin United to Amend](#) has been working prodigiously over the last decade getting one local community after another to pass referendums or resolutions in favor of such an amendment. At last count, 169 communities have signed on.

It will take more work, here in Wisconsin and around the country, to get this done.

But it must be done if we are to have a genuine democracy.

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